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Smith Ascends to Chair of Senate EPW Committee *New Hampshire Senator Returns to Republican Fold, Leadership Position*

In the wake of the sudden death of Rhode Island Senator and **Environment and Public Works Committee Chairman John Chafee** (R) on October 24, 1999, Senate Republicans have named **New Hampshire Senator Robert C. Smith** to lead the committee. Smith's selection as committee chairman came soon after he announced on November 1, 1999 his return to the Republican Party.

Smith left the Republican Party earlier this year after experiencing frustration with his party over their handling of the gun control issue. Smith also had a short-lived bid for the presidency and chose to run as an independent. Since his departure from the party, Smith had been allowed to retain his committee

assignments and even the chairmanship of the Select Ethics Committee. **Majority Leader Trent Lott** (R – MS) apparently had faith that Smith would return to the Republican fold and had been talking with Smith over the past several months to convince him to return to the party.

The other major contender for the EPW Committee chair was **Oklahoma Senator James Inhofe**. Inhofe, a leader in the efforts to streamline the Clean Air Act and provide greater flexibility for states and localities under the Act, stated that he would have been privileged to lead the committee. However, Republican Senators easily elected Smith after Inhofe withdrew his challenge for the post.

Aviation Conference Locked Over Funding Debate *Guaranteed Funding versus Appropriations & Budget Cap*

The House-Senate conference on H.R. 1000 continues into its third week with little progress on the key funding issues necessary for final passage of the multi-year aviation authorization legislation. With the target adjournment scheduled for as early as next week, there is little time for negotiators to work out a deal that would continue funding for the nation's aviation programs.

House Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman Bud Shuster (R – PA) has insisted that the final measure provide a guaranteed increased spending level for Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) programs. **Senate Budget Committee Chairman Pete V. Domenici** (R – NM) and **Commerce Aviation Subcommittee Chairman Slade Gorton** (R – WA) have said that they will not agree to any budget mechanism that does not make aviation programs subject to the annual appropriations process and its budgetary limitations.

The key to the final deal is likely to be treatment of the general fund contribution to the FAA operations and other aviation infrastructure programs. Shuster argues that the \$3 billion general fund contribution should continue and be guaranteed. Domenici has proposed to guarantee all incoming ticket taxes for aviation programs, but not the existing trust fund surplus or accumulated interest.

House Transportation and Infrastructure Aviation Subcommittee ranking member William Lipinski (D – IL) suggested a compromise that would guarantee spending all ticket tax revenue plus the \$11 billion surplus and interest money in the trust fund, but not the general fund contribution. Senators have objected to this proposal, but this idea is likely to become the focus of further negotiations. The Lipinski proposal would provide less money than Shuster's plan but more than the Domenici proposal.

The *Federal Flyer* is a publication of the TxDOT Legislative Affairs Office. It is intended to provide up-to-date information on major legislative activities in the 106th Congress for the management of the Texas Department of Transportation, state leaders, and others interested in Texas transportation issues. This report will also feature key activities in the national transportation community. Sources include news services and staff reports.

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